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MASTER OF ARTS (VISUAL ARTS)

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finding home
outside in / inside out

Abstract

Finding home: outside/in, inside/out: research into the notion of home. The work explores ways of constructing home in relation to place and contrasts this with drawing home out from inside the body. A study taking the form of an exhibition of sculptural objects exhibited at the ANU School of Art Gallery from June 30th to July 2nd, 2005, which comprises the outcome of the Studio Practice component, and together with the Report, documents the nature of study undertaken.

Wendy Brown - research

John Turner

Colleen

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Quentin Bell - for strong artwork

David Cherry - for aesthetic interest

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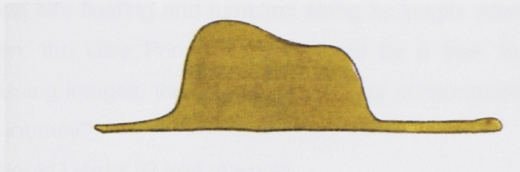
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*'I showed my drawing to the grown ups, and asked them whether the drawing frightened them. But they answered: "Frighten? Why should one be frightened by a hat?" My drawing was not a picture of a hat. It was a picture of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant.'*¹



¹ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, trans. Katherine Woods (Mammouth, 1945), p 5-6

Preface

I had the beginning of a story in my head. A story about a person/animal, a small dainty thing, appearing at first quite fragile. A shock of hair and a desire to know things. What I am describing is the Little Prince. This seems inappropriate, the appropriation of someone else's character, but maybe not, maybe it is the qualities of the Little Prince that I want my character to have. A big heart, a need for knowledge, a frustration with order, an appreciation of beauty, a desire to care for others and the ability to see things without preconceptions. Perhaps these are all very admirable qualities.

So I take this character, this little prince and set him off on a journey, a journey of discovery. He is an explorer arriving in Australia, the place that I want to understand, the place that I love. I will leave the people out for the moment, the people complicate the story they restrict the place, they muddy the water, and water is where I shall begin.

The Little Prince arrives with a plop, right in the middle of a swirling pool of water, a pool that spits him out and sends him floating and tumbling along its length. After a while floating and bobbing up and down, the Little Prince gets snagged by a tree. Suddenly still, without movement and the passing images, the Prince has time for contemplation. What to do? How am I going to take this journey?

I need a vessel, how should I make it? and of what?

It needs to be sturdy, not too easily tossed about and damaged by rocks and tree roots,

It needs to be my size, big enough only to carry me. I don't want it to be big and clumsy, I want to be able to move easily in and out of all places.

I need to be able to manage it on my own, maneuvering in and out, up and down as need be.

I need it to be self sufficient, to look after itself. If I have to leave it for a time I don't want to have to worry about it.

I want it to become part of the river.

I shall make it of steel, thin steel that won't hole easily, but no need to be thick and chunky, weighing me down. A skeletal frame like these leaves, or a fish, so that it becomes part of the river, a fish swimming amongst others, a leaf lying on the bank. It will be skiff-like in form, light and swift.

I shall need a platform, a place to sleep and from which to view the world. For this perhaps I shall use wire, I can make whatever I need with this and it will give me something to do along the way. I will make frames and fill them with the wire as I go. I can even unravel and rework them as my needs change. I will make my boat and start my journey.

Once my boat is made I continue my journey down the river and start thinking more and more about the plants I pass. They are really quite strange, some of the flowers, even on grass, are incredibly detailed and intricate. I decide that I should be recording this somehow, I need an easy way to do it, especially as I don't know anything about them, I just want to capture their texture and shape. I've got, it I will get some clay from the riverbank and press the flowers into the clay as you would to make biscuits. I will make a shape like that of the leaves as they smell good and will remind me to look at them more closely at some stage. I like the idea that these shapes will resemble food, as I am sure at least some of them are edible, and maybe through doing this I will come up with some cooking ideas. Then I can just throw them all together and make a big pile that I can add to whenever I like.

I have been travelling down the river for some time now. The river is very curvy, twisting and turning so much that at times I feel quite dizzy. At these times I pull up out of the water and go for a walk. Once I am up the bank and through the trees that flank the river, the land opens out dramatically, it is like walking onto a different planet. No trees, flat and straight. The land has been cut up into squares and rectangles defined by posts and wires, the different areas are different colours, all ordered and neat, each area perhaps pertaining to one particular plant, not at all like the vegetation along the river. This pattern reminds me of quilts made of different colours sewn together, and I decide to try and make one myself using plants that I find along the way. Now I have a project I have to find the materials to make my cloth and then maybe I can make it into a cloak that will cover and protect me from the sun and wind.²

² Extract from my diary , 2002.

Introduction

'finding home: outside/in, inside/out' describes my journey. My initial concept was to explore psychological connection to place, in an attempt find a home for myself. Having grown up without a specific place as home, I arrived at a point where I wanted to understand what this meant and how to deal with it, to make myself feel at home, somewhere, anywhere.

I started looking at questions of cultural identity, in particular ideas that related to connection to land. Writers such as Peter Read³, David Tacey⁴, and Tom Griffiths⁵ have approached this by looking at the relationship to land of aboriginal people and contrasting this to a lack of relationship to land in European, migrant Australians. There are connections made to land and spirituality, and land and ownership. My approach uses my own experience as the reference point. I grew up in cities and never had any experience of the bush. However aged 20 I traveled overseas for approximately 10 months, during which time I found myself longing for the Australian bush, the dryness, the grasses and Gum trees, space. Since then I have traveled and lived in different parts of Australia with very different landscapes, and feel that I have a very strong connection to these, in particular the desert and the ocean, big, wild spaces. Spaces where I am not in control, where there is an archetypal force at hand.

In February 2005 I attended a conference in Sydney entitled 'The Poetics of Australian Space'. There were nearly 50 different presenters ranging from story-tellers, to artists, to writers, to theorists, to dancers, cultural producers of one form or another. For five days I breathed essences of Australia, through other's interpretations. At the end, I felt beaten up and yet invigorated. What came out of this cacophony of ideas for me, was an over-riding complexity, a tension/struggle woven with reverie, always connected to space, outdoor space and the natural world. How we as humans interact with this, connect to this, see ourselves in relation to this and form deep psychological relationships to the 'space' which is Australia. The conference used Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*⁶ and applied it to the 'outside', an Australian outside. In my search for home, I too have taken Gaston Bachelard's spatial associations and looked at them in relation to my own connection and understanding of place.

³ Peter Read, *Belonging : Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership* (Cambridge ; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴ Tacey J. David J. Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred, Transformation in Australia* (Melbourne: HarperCollins Australia Pty Ltd, 1995).

⁵ Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors : The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia, Studies in Australian History*. (Cambridge ; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁶ Bachelard, Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique De L'espace*, trans. Maria Jolas, 1994 edition ed. (Beacon Press, 1958).

I have constructed spaces, firstly by drawing materials and forms from outside, in the manner of an architect, and then I have changed direction and started making from the inside, from my subconscious, the results being formless, undefined, unattached. Through this process I have found many different definitions of home and/or places where home can be. I have also had to look at my experience as an aspect of my gender and think about associations not only with the body but also in terms of a cultural experience of being Australian. Lisa Slater referred to this in her presentation at the Poetics of Space conference. She made reference to her own growing up on an apple orchard in Queensland, and spoke about her experience as an adolescent. "At a point in time I stopped hanging around with my father, going with him and the men out working in the paddocks. Instead I stayed inside with my mother and did domestic things. Now I relate that to a time when my sexuality surfaced and I saw the outside as mens' domain, something I now as a female could not comfortably occupy, even though I still wanted to."⁷

⁷ Slater, Lisa, Poetics of Space conference paper, 2005.

The psychology of home

The house;

Without it man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human beings first world. Before he is "cast into the world," as claimed by certain hasty metaphysics, man is laid in the cradle of the house....Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house.⁶

This is a comfortable image but one with which many people may not be able to relate in their own lives. I have no recollection of the house where I was born and as my family moved house and country every couple of years I created my own enclosed and protected space under blankets thrown over constructions of chairs. Later I went to boarding school where there was no privacy and certainly no warm or comforting space. Here I exercised my imagination by cutting house advertisements from the newspaper and dreaming about the warm enclosing spaces they might offer. In order to attempt to make these imaginary spaces real, I studied architecture.

My topic of exploration has grown from these experiences and although it may seem to be something one could explore in the design field, I didn't feel I could do it from that direction. I have worked in architecture, urban design and landscape architecture and they are all attached to the commercial, as such there is limited room for focusing on the intangible. I felt there wasn't the space there for me to express myself. I wanted to go where Gaston Bachelard leads us in *Poetics of Space*. He uses poetry and literature to illustrate what cannot be expressed in nonfiction. I felt that I could use the art making process to explore what I couldn't through architecture/design.

*Thirty spokes converge upon a single hub;
It is on the hole in the centre that the purpose of the axle
depends*

*We make a vessel from a lump of clay;
It is the empty space within the vessel that makes it
useful*

*We make doors and windows for a room
But it is the empty spaces that make the room habitable*

*Thus while the tangible has advantages;
It is the intangible that makes it useful.*

Lao Tzu (c.550 BC)

⁶Bachelard, *La Poétique De L'espace*.p7

100 Acres

Everyone seems to remember the 100 Acres Wood in the Pooh Bear stories. Personally I had more of a connection with the Magic Faraway Tree by Enid Blyton. These two children's stories came back to me the first time I visited 100 Acres, an area of re-vegetated bush in suburban Melbourne. It is unique in form being 100 acres of bush, cutout, in a perfect rectangle, of suburban Melbourne, backed onto on all sides by the quintessential aussie back yard. The sub-divisions on each of the four sides has occurred over the last four decades, and each side of the rectangle is a testimony to the values of that time, displayed in the architectural treatment of the houses and the landscape of the back gardens. The 100 Acres itself is a magic place, once inside you lose all connection to the constructed and can imagine yourself, as I did, arriving in foreign places, meeting weird and wonderful creatures and generally reverting to those places we went in our imagination as children.

In 2002 I put together an exhibition of work made in response to this magical place. The 100 acres of the reserve had a long and varied history/story in terms of its connection to people. I focused on the way in which the character of land infiltrates people's homes through the domestic. The way in which we build a nest in an environment with windows and doors specifically located to capture the sun or a view. We draw the outside in through imagery and patterning of furnishings and architectural detailing. We draw our food from the land around us (theoretically speaking), and pattern crockery with the flowers and fruits of the place. All the essential aspects of survival housing(shelter), food and clothing, absorb aspects of the natural into their visual language. Finishing this project, I wanted to explore these ideas further. I saw it as being about feeling at home in a place, connecting to the nature of a place and drawing it into your psyche.



Lolly bags, 2001. Plaster, vegetation, banana fibre. 150dia. X 150mm.

Photo of path within 100 Acres Reserve, 2001.



Rivers

I lived in Melbourne in 2002 and every morning I would walk with my dog along the river. I began thinking about the river on these walks. I found that what I really loved was the idea that the river was going somewhere, it offered the idea of a continuous journey, it was an invitation to my imagination.

...to see a river was to be swept up in a great current of myths and memories that was strong enough to carry us back to the first watery element of our existence in the womb. And along that stream were borne some of the most intense of our social and animal passions: the mysterious transmutations of blood; the vitality and mortality of heroes, empire, nations and gods.⁹

I decided to use the metaphoric quality of rivers, as the starting point for my journey into the exploration of home. Rivers act as a functional and rational tool that has enabled humans to settle in one place. The river does this by providing fresh water, and a means of transportation, connection to other places for trade etc...The relationship that is developed is one of dependency, the human to the river on a very basic level. I believe the interaction between the two has led to the forming of a deep psychological relationship. They also provide a connection between the earth and the human body.

In Chinese medicine arteries are called rivers. They provide blood to parts of the body as rivers provide water to parts of the earth.



Photograph of river near its mouth in the King Sound, North Western Australia, 1997.

⁹ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), p.247.

Artists

Artists whose work has influenced me, Hossein Valamanesh, Antony Gormley, Anish Kapoor, and Louise Bourgeois. The work of Hossein Valamanesh and Antony Gormley I looked at when commencing. Anish Kapoor, and Louise Bourgeois became more important as I moved further towards the inside. I am interested in Hossein Valamanesh's assimilation of place into being, human and landscape. I was also intrigued by Paul Carter's discussion of Valamanesh's work in relation to the gap¹⁰. The idea of a 'gap', resonates with my exploration of home and security, and travel and adventure.

In Antony Gormley's work I see people in relation to nature, people struggling with this relationship. *Another Place* (1997)¹¹ expresses the essence of what I seek to explore. In *Another Place* one hundred life size figures are cast in iron and placed on a beach and out into the sea. I have only seen photographs of this work, in the publication cited, but what the photographs evoke is a sense of humans wanting to connect with the natural world. The figures have a sense of animal, there's solitude and peace and a spatial quality that while hard to describe, embodies a sense of desolation, a search for something. My concerns are different, but the emotional content and response that the works instill resonate with what I try to capture.

I have always been enamoured of Anish Kapoor's work, for me the work is imbued with passion and sensuality. I see his works as navigating the boundary between male and female, the outside and the inside. Works that demonstrate this are *Mother as a Mountain* (1985),¹² and *Taratantara* (1999)¹³. *Mother as a Mountain* (1985) is a work presented in a gallery, of human scale, personal and intimate. *Taratantara* (1999), on the other hand is an installation that filled a building, it is a construction in conversation with the building. The imagery is not really different to that in *Mother as a Mountain*, however, through its presentation it has become more 'outside'. Both works draw you into a space whose quality is not tangible. But where there is expression of an internal.

*"What I am trying to do is to make a picture of the interior of me."*¹⁴

¹⁰ Paul Carter, *Hossein Valamanesh* (An Art and Australia Book, 1996).p7.

¹¹ E.H. Gombrich John Hutchinson, Lela B. Njatin, W.T.J. Mitchell, *Antony Gormley*, 2nd edition, 2000 ed. (Phaidon Press Limited, 1995).cover

¹² Marco Livingstone, ed., Anish Kapoor (Kyoto Shoin, 1990).fig. 11.

¹³ Sarah Martin Anna Tetas, ed., Anish Kapoor *Taratantara* (Barcelona: ACTAR Publishers, 2000). Image p. 6.

¹⁴ Anish Kapoor, Jeremy Lewison, and Tate Gallery, *Anish Kapoor : Drawings* (London: Tate Gallery, 1990). p.11.



Anish Kapoor, *Mother as a Mountain*, 1985 Wood, gesso and pigment
Collection Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis, Minnesota, U.S.A



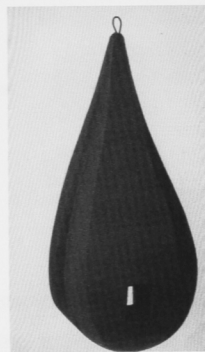
Anish Kapoor, Installation in the old Baltic flour Mill, Newcastle, U.K. *Tarantara*, 7th July – 1st Sept. 1999.

Louise Bourgeois,

*"although still preoccupied with dependence and independence, enclosure and exclusion, the aggressive and the vulnerable, order and disorder....The hanging, nest like bag forms merge inside and outside to return to the body-house images. Like the skeins of wool, they are friendly; you can hide inside of them."*¹⁵

The above quotation refers to a series of works entitled '*Liars*'. It is these works in particular that I am interested in. I have found it extremely difficult to track images down but saw one image in Lucy Lippard, *Overlay Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*¹⁶. This is a plaster form that reminds me of houses built into the sides of a mountain, some of which I saw many years ago in Southern France. Another Liar appears in Louise Bourgeois¹⁷, this one made from rubber. The works express a fusing of the notion of house/home and the female body.

The work is autobiographical as perhaps all artists' work is, the gender quality the total 'femaleness' of the work is inspiring. It is not a defined 'femaleness' but an expression of her own struggle and attempt at an understanding of the complexity and ambiguity apparent in us all. Experimentation in materials is apparent in the range of materials that Bourgeois employs. She obviously respects the material and uses the inherent quality of the material as a means of expression: compare *Femme Couteau*, pink marble, 1968-1970, with the costumes she made from latex used in *Confrontation* (1978). She seems to have had such a broad range of experiences through her work, that no matter what you are personally dealing with at the time you can turn to her work and find an aspect of it there.



Louise Bourgeois, *Liar*. Rubber. 1986

¹⁵ Lucy R. Lippard, *From the Centre: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976).p.241.

¹⁶ Lucy Lippard, *Overlay Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, First ed. (Pantheon Books, 1983).

¹⁷ Louise Bourgeois et al., *Louise Bourgeois : Blue Days and Pink Days* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 1997). image p.183.

Embark

This was my starting point, the idea of a journey. It was to be a journey through landscape and the imagination of landscape, in search of place, a place to call home. *Swallows & Amazons*¹⁸ is a book about a group of children who have a small sailing boat, which they use to explore their environment. They live on a lake and use their boat to explore a nearby island, camping/ making shelters, getting scared, having battles, etc... It was this sense of exploration that I was endeavouring to recapture and so I decided to make a boat. Beds also came into my mind, especially a flying bed, *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*¹⁹, another children's story.

Whilst absorbed in this reverie I was reading *Landprints; Reflections on Place and Landscape*²⁰, which led me to *Fragmens du dernier, Voyage de La Perouse*²¹ a 17th Century Utopian fiction thought to be based on early sightings of Australia. Various early expeditions into the centre of Australia also came to mind. My compulsion with the boat was my own desire to explore the unknown, within the context of an Australian landscape, so I had in mind the dry riverbed. In reflecting on the resultant object, I see the bed as my personal space, my home for the duration of the journey as described in the preface.

*My bed is like a little boat;
Nurse helps me in when I embark;
She girds me in my sailor's coat
And starts me in the dark*

*At night I go on board and say
Good-night to all my friends on shore;
I shut my eyes and sail away
And see and hear no more.*

*And sometimes things to bed I take,
As prudent sailors do perhaps a slice of wedding-cake,
Perhaps a toy or two.*

*All night across the dark we steer;
But when the day returns at last,
Safe in my room beside the pier,
I find my vessel fast.²²*

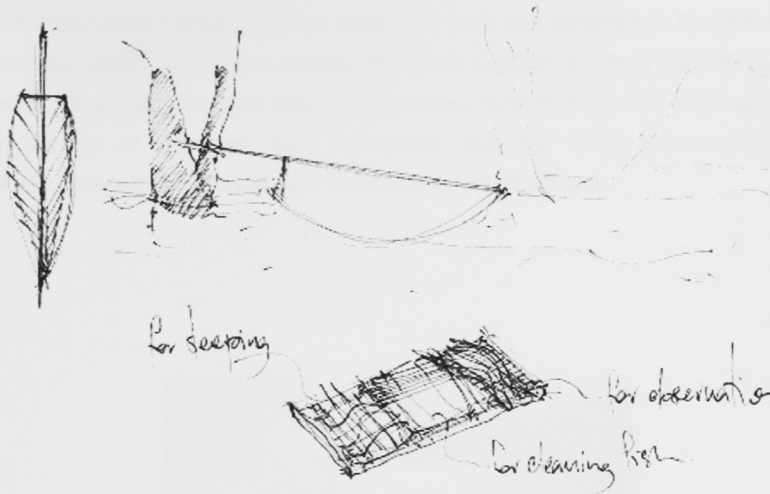
My boat was to be part of the landscape and so I made a structure similar to that of the veins of a leaf or the skeleton of a fish. The shape, scale and structure coming together gradually. I wanted this thing to be my size and just for me, so its length and width were based on me in a sitting position. I wanted to be able to move it around by myself, both in an imaginary sense,

¹⁸ Arthur Ransom, *Swallows & Amazons* (Jonathan Cape, 1930).

¹⁹ Mary Norton, "Bedknobs and Broomsticks," (1971). Film based on the novel, produce by Walt Disney

²⁰ George Seddon, *Landprints Reflections on Place and Landscape* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

²¹ La Perouse, *Fragmens Du Dernier*, trans. John Dunmore (1797).



Sketches from diary, 2003

and in a real sense, so I could work on it without needing help. The means of introducing movement came through the bed, by making the top the bed, as a raft or platform that would move separately to the base with the transfer of weight. In these decisions there is a blurring, for me, between the real and the imaginary. The object was this thing in my head enabling me as an imaginary person to go on a journey. I was the Little Prince²³. I felt that *Embark* was my 'home' and the vehicle that would enable my journey. The form grew from and was connected to the elusive river.

I used steel sheet, steel rod and copper wire. I had played around with using a bed base (found object) as the raft but felt that it undermined the 'imaginary' aspect. I also had ideas of using very fine fabric as a casing for leaf litter, to make a sort of mattress. However, I realised I didn't want to introduce another material, different in texture, that had different qualities of permanence. That steel rusts and copper develops a patina, both in response to the environment and time, were significant reasons for their selection.

²² Robert Louis Stevenson, *My Bed is a Boat*. www.bygosh.com/Features/072000/bedandboat.htm

²³ This report p.2.

Using steel I learnt how to cut with an oxy acetylene torch, weld and grind back the edges. This was my first work, which I finished in May 2002. The work was exhibited in Grenfell as part of the Lachlan: Blue-Gold²⁴. While I was minding the show, a group of school children aged 10-12 came through. When asked by their teacher which piece they liked the best their reply was the boat. My reading of this was their connection with the boat, sub-consciously and metaphorically, through children's books. I felt I had achieved my goal.



Embark, Steel, wood, copper wire. 70 x 65 x 240 cm.
Grenfell, June 2003.

²⁴ The Lachlan : Blue-Gold was an exhibition of work developed through the Environment Studio from filed trips in the Grenfell, Cowra region of NSW. Works were exhibited in Grenfell and at the Orange Regional Gallery, 2003.

Nest

"Experiments showed that birds deprived of opportunities to practise and suitable materials are subsequently unable to build adequate nests, or even to build at all. Indeed fiddling about with potential nest material appears to be just as essential for the bird, in preparing itself for future building, as is the babbling of the human infant in preparing itself for speech."²⁵

I was ready to embark, I was off and away on my journey. On a field trip with Environmental Studies, we went flying over the Lachlan River north of Cowra. The river meandered as a squiggling green line through a grid like pattern of paddocks of various shades of green and brown. It was a patchwork quilt. Back on land I collected grasses, plants that I could use to make a quilt.

Returning to the workshop I met a visiting artist from Korea, Kyong-Ok Chon. She was working in the paper making room and had a lot of experience in making paper but had never used plant fibre before. We decided to work together and share our skills. We worked in the paper making room intensively for a two week period. The process is very similar to cooking; there is the initial engagement with the environment in the collection of the plants (growing your own vegetables, shopping), preparation, in this case washing and cutting, (washing and storing), then cooking and finally, testing (tasting). In both instances there is no definite outcome. The resultant paper is determined, by its plant of origin: the season when you picked it, and whether you used new or old growth. A recipe will never produce identical results because the ingredients are living organisms. The individual nature of the material coming from a seemingly singular source, led to reflection upon the individual and /or unique within the collective.

A part of the process that I particularly enjoyed was working with someone else, especially someone from a different cultural background. This is more characteristic of crafts and, in particular, of indigenous art-making where the making for ceremony and tradition involves groups of people interacting in a pre-described way. In contrast western art-making can be very solitary. For me the advantages of working with others are not only in the sharing of skills, but also in the time spent in labour. Time when you talk about all sorts of things and can enjoy a sense of the collective, this is especially rich when working with people from different cultural backgrounds. Working with others, especially in combination with interaction with plants and

²⁵ P. Graves-Brown, *Matter, Materiality, and Modern Culture* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2000).p. 66-67

nature was something that I decided I wanted to explore further. This became part of the impetus for later choosing to go to Arnhem Land to learn about weaving with Pandanus.

The repetitive nature of paper making means that you spend time working with the material, acquiring, through time spent, a sense of its nature, and hence, potential applications. The scale and shapes of the units of paper I began to make were based on the patterning of paddocks seen from the air. I began to see the pieces of paper as a quilt or a cloak, a protective cover for the body. I made a steel frame over which the material could be draped to form a cloak, the inside being empty but lit so that it would glow with a presence. Head bowed with hood giving the sense of complete enclosure, focusing on the inside, the form of the figure wrapping, enclosing.

I wanted the construction to spark off childhood memories, like the building of card and cubby houses. I wanted to instill a desire to enter inside. The frame was approximately 1.5 times my size. I stitched pieces of paper together with individual cross-stitches which has the effect of joining through gaps rather than an overlapping or solid joint. The whole becomes seemingly fragile, and yet the paper is quite strong. The cross-stitch had associations for me with age. I related the stitch to that used with sewing animal pelts, cow-boy and Indian suits.

I made a frame and tried this, but was not happy with the result, somehow the paper as 'clothing' didn't work. I thought at first that it was the difference between the horizontal and vertical. Like comparing brick paving to a brick wall, the scale shifts and with the paper the idea of covering didn't come through in the vertical. The stiffness of the paper perhaps denied any reading of an implied figure and the material doesn't read of warmth or comfort. I am now playing with ways in which to use the paper to make a cubby house I want to use a corner space, to engage with the architecture of the room whilst simultaneously rejecting the architecture by being forced to build within it.



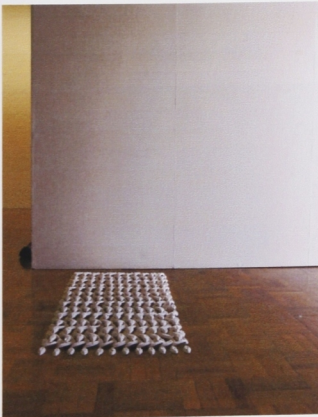
Holed Up, July 2005. Paper made from grasses, linen thread, timber and string. 90 x 180 x 110cm Graduate Exhibition, School of Art July 2005.

Quilt, Paper made from grasses. Dims. variable. Aug. 2003.



I kept returning to the story retold in the preface. It was my guide. I decided that I needed a form of documentation for my travels; photographs, the bits we collect along the way, reminders of a place. Clay seemed an appropriate material, I could press vegetation into the clay and then burn the plant out through firing, leaving the mark. I had a vast collection of vegetation, the outcome of my papermaking, and decided to use clay to record the marks of the vegetation.

I had approached the paper making as a cooking exercise and now I could take that simile further. I used a steel mould to make a series of wax positives, from which I made a plaster tray as a press mould for biscuits. Once I had the mould, I was intent on making a large quantity of the same unit, like a science experiment where you have your control. My control was the form of the biscuit which, dictated the size of vegetation that could be incorporated, the minutiae. This had two effects. First I could play with my initial interest in perception, the form of the biscuit containing marks of vegetation, marks not generally associated with food. Then I could also bring into focus the intricate detail and delicate qualities that are inherent in the vegetation. I felt the process also to be a mechanism through which I could nest, immersing myself in the environment and gathering it around me, potentially using it to construct home. I took this further by establishing a routine, walking and collecting material, making a tray of 'biscuits' every morning. In the evening the 'biscuits' were dry enough to remove from the mould, ready for the next tray the next day. I put this process to the test whilst doing a residency at Bundanon. Here I decided to setup the routine in an almost ritualistic manner, as a means of embedding myself in place and time. I had struggled with a form of presentation for the pieces, but through this more structured and ritualistic aspect of the process a form evolved; a bed, coffin, finding oneself at home in the environment, melting into it becoming part of it.



Home, Porcelain, oxides 4.5 x 90x 180cm.
December 2004



Detail *Home*, Porcelain, oxides, individual pieces 1.5 x 4.5 x 8cm December 2004

Hold

I wanted to continue working with the collection of materials from the environment I also wanted to engage in a collective making process. The idea of spending time with indigenous women, in Arnhem Land, women working in fibre, seemed appropriate. It would enable me to be in Australia; working within an Australian environment, be with people from a different cultural background, offering a shift in perspective. At Fusion²⁶ I met Steve Westerly from Injalak Arts Centre in Gunbalunya. I contacted the centre introducing myself and what I wanted to do. Following discussions with their board, I was very generously offered the opportunity to spend a month at the Arts Centre and provided with accommodation. I received a materials grant from NITA which enabled me to get there.

I went to the Arts Centre on a daily basis for a month. I hung out with the women and they taught me all the different methods that they currently apply to the making of baskets. I participated in all stages of the process from the collection of the Pandanus, to the final weaving of a basket.

I found the time challenging emotionally. I felt intrusive, that my position in the community was clouded and framed by a government and history that I didn't want to be connected to. I wanted to be a person visiting a different culture, as I had as a child. Learning, gaining insight into a culture and respecting the differences. Eventually it was craft and the act of making that broke down the barriers for me. By spending time with the women in making, I was able to feel a sense of connection.

Roslyn Nayilibidj, elder working at the Arts Centre. She was my main teacher. Here she is splitting the pandanus.
February 2004.

My first basket. February 2004.



²⁶ Fusions across the Arts Symposium, 10-12 April, 2003. The Australian National University.

On my return I started to work in response to my experience. I wanted to make a space; container, home, that expressed the conflicting emotions I had at the time. The idea was a cubby house. My initial concept was to weave outer (curtain) walls in Pandanus, and line them internally with flattened steel cans, both materials I had collected and brought back with me. The scale and proportion were to be based on containing an individual human figure. Ideally I had hoped to make a structure that you could go into and experience aerial slides of landscape surrounding you on the steel walls. The intent being to emphasise the contradiction between the landscape, the bleakness and brutality of the internal enclosure, and the connection through the craft of the curtain walls to its environment. Starting to weave I realised two things. First, that I was attempting to produce a rectangular shape using a technique that relies on a circular form to provide structural strength, and secondly, that by putting the two skins together I would be sacrificing many of the inherent qualities of the weaving. This made me think more about the weaving and the purpose for employing this technique and material.

Working with fibre in Gunbalanya is an exclusively female activity. I had spent my time with women and especially women making baskets. Taking these thoughts back to the form of the 'cubby house' I realised that my interest was more specifically in femaleness, craft and collection as aspects of making home. In this context the craft nature of the weaving was particularly relevant, and so I started playing with ideas that combined the making of vessels (traditional purpose) with the making of clothes (my personal female experience) together with the idea of a swag (temporary home).

I decided to work around my body, using my body as the frame. The weaving practice relies heavily on the body as a tool. For example bags are made around legs so that you can keep the tension consistent, you use the way you hold your body to dictate the resultant shape and size. Using this approach the work became a kind of exoskeleton, a protective covering. It was a safe place that the women taught me to make for myself. A space, that was connected to that particular place through its materials and my own involvement in the collection.



Hold, Pandanus, natural dyes. 65 x 30 x 180cm.
2004



Detail, *Hold*, Pandanus, natural dyes.
30 x 65 x 180cm 2004.

Lock

The house I had stayed in was highly rated in the 'white' community as it was 'secure', fixed wire mesh, louvered windows and lockable screen door all meant to make us feel safe. In this safe house my desire was to scream, to break a window or tear something apart. I felt confined. The house was rectangular, the blocks made to build it rectangular. In this land of luscious curves²⁷, the house was all corners. The house made me feel at home outside and uncomfortable inside, not quite as black and white as the words may imply.

I started with flattened steel tins that I had collected from the community. I collected other materials from the tip, building remnants, wire and corrugated iron. I was gathering materials, going through a process I determined as part of home making. This home was not cosy, it clattered with conflicting emotions, it was harsh and rigid, but at the same time offered protection. It had to be rectangular in form. The rectangular form enabled a horizontal emphasis. I feel this not only to be in relation to landscape, Australian landscape, but also in relation to the human body and its relationship to land.²⁸

*What I refer to as horizontality is part of this country, is that dimension, that linearity, that enormous extension of the land. And I find my buildings wanting to partake of it – there's nothing sillier in this country than a little bungalow sitting alone in the landscape.*²⁹

The size of the enclosed space was determined by my own size. I felt this to be particularly important to me in respect of my experience in the community, which had reinforced the notion of myself as a single person, alone, not attached to a wider community in a day to day sense of being. The roof of the trunk looks like it is attempting to fly away, a rod extends as a handle or lever. These aspects of the work refer to an ambivalence in the idea of home, as a fixed place. Conferring to the idea of nomadism and journey. I used the materials to emphasize feelings of entrapment, the steel bars, and layers of mesh that have been distorted.

²⁷ A perspective gained from many small plane rides over the landscape.

²⁸ To be taken up in later works, see sacs.

²⁹ Philip Drew, *Leaves of Iron* : Glenn Murcutt, Pioneer of an Australian Architectural Form (Sydney: Law Book Co, 1985).P. 58.



Lock, Recycled building materials. 90 x 70 x 165 cm. 2004.



Detail, *Lock*, 2004.

Transition

Keep

There is a space between life and death. I sat in this space with my mother. She was anxious, scared of the unknown, scared as a child is scared. It was her own space the space of the dying while I was the onlooker and as the onlooker I was hoping for the end, willing it to come, but at the same time apprehensive. It appeared as a line, both of us were aware of the line, once the line was crossed, neither of us would know where we were. My rational mind kept me calm during this time, I felt absolutely positive that my mother's dying was a good thing. She had struggled with cancer for a long time and her body was simply deteriorating, when your mind is still active, this is a difficult thing to come to terms with. When she died I went to pieces, my protective shell shattered, I felt the cutting of the umbilical chord.

At the time I wanted to make her a vehicle for her journey. I turned to crafts as a means of making that would enable me to make her a safe place in the same way I had made *Embark*, for myself. I ended up making a vehicle that embodied how I was feeling in relation to her. I wanted to wrap her up tight, the way in which a baby is swathed. I also wanted to refer to the womb, the place where I had been nurtured and brought to life.

I knew nothing about felt-making but decided that this could be a material that would allow me to express the comfort, protection and softness that I had lost as well as the primal instincts that I was feeling. I called Ann Peters (a textile student with felting expertise). She gave me a broad overview of the process, in a short period of time, which gave me the means to explore the material in terms of the qualities I was looking for. Since then Ann has kept in touch and monitored my progress giving me invaluable support.

I came across an image of a work by Sydney Blum.³⁰



Sydney Blum, *Finding Home 2*, Horsehair felt, 10dia x 33cm. 1993.

³⁰ Patricia C. Phillips, "Sculptor' Drawings:," *Sculpture* (USA), Jan - Feb 1995 1993.

An aspect of this work that I particularly enjoyed was that it looked like you could crawl into it. It was only when I was copying the dimensions that I realised this idea was totally inaccurate! Lucky for me that I didn't realise this at the time. As it was this aspect that led me to really explore the potential of felt in making large, body sized pieces.

The image I was working to was of a kangaroo's pouch. I made a number of test pieces all of which had quite a different form, that of an old woman whose body weighed down by time shuffles along. The felt was reasonably stiff and did retain its shape, but I didn't feel that it would be strong enough to do that once I scaled it up. Returning to the idea of a container for my mother, I decided to work with strips of material, investigating the mummification process and swaddling. I made strips like bandages that I could wrap around a frame.

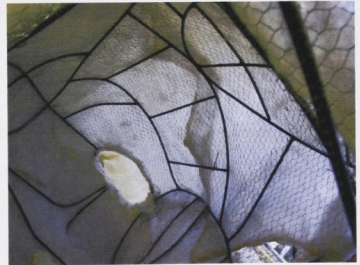


Test piece, July 2004.



Making the bandages.

Steel frame from inside when wrapped with wire and padding.



Steel rod seemed the obvious choice. Bending shaping and welding the steel I worked up a form, modeling it on a miniature form made from clay. Once I started it was like being in automatic pilot, the form just emerged. I was working quickly, feeling my way from one piece to the next. The final form was quite odd but I liked it. The process itself was like drawing using steel lines. I was using body elements (such as shoulder blades and hips) but found that I needed to digress from this in areas like the stomach, this was where I first became aware of the conflict between the inside and outside, structurally, spatially and psychologically.

Once I started to wrap several things happened. First, there was a contraction between the frame, the linear quality of it, and the way in which I was covering it. Then I had a whole lot of issues with the wrapping itself. If I just wrapped in one direction the wrapping wouldn't hold properly and I couldn't get it tight. I then tried using the steel 'sections' that had been created and ended up with sections wrapped in different directions. This was quite interesting and I persevered for quite some time but I still wasn't getting the desired feeling from it, it became fragmented rather than one piece. It wasn't just the outside I was dealing with either it was also what happened inside. The frame enabled a view of the inside an opening, the intention being to recreate a sense of the womb. I tried covering the frame in chicken wire to give flatter surfaces to hold to, then covering this with padding, at which point it became a formless log. Finally I sewed a fleece to the inside of the frame and quilted it, to strengthen it, which gave me enough weight in the shape, and a suitably sticky surface, that enabled me to wrap the outside tightly.



It looked like a log.



Frame with fleece and first bandage.

The material bandages themselves are animal like. I incorporated lots of different types of wool, sheep, alpaca, goat and used mainly unwashed and untreated wool with washed combed wool to hold it together. The fleece on the inside was one whole piece straight off the sheep's back and it has maintained the smell of the animal. The dilemma for me in the final piece is that the structure is hidden. I have always been a purist in terms of structure and am a bit uncomfortable with its lack of reference in the final piece. This led me back to my initial desire to make a single piece of felt with no added structure. I still did not have my kangaroo pouch.



Keep, Wool felt, steel, woolen fleece. 90 x 70 x 180 cm. 2004.

Inside out – Later Works

Felt

I was drawn to felt. I read technical books that started with a history of the material. What appealed to me in this is the inter-relationship between the animal and people and the nomadic associations. The nomads of Asia, shepherds, used sheep for food, clothing and housing, necessities for survival. The sheep rely on man as the shepherd, the protector, whilst the humans rely on the sheep to survive. The symbiosis of the relationship resonated with me. The connection of the material to a nomadic culture made sense. Felt becoming the house, led me to reflecting on the symbolic nature of sheep in Australia, the sheep brought with white settlers. Then there are the psychological aspects of the material, the perception of warmth and comfort, protection again survival.

Joseph Beuys brought felt to the attention of the art world. Two aspects of his use of the material resonate with me: one is his association with shamanism and healing, the other an emphasis on human as animal. Both reflected in his work, *I like America and America likes Me*, 1974,³¹ photograph by Lorraine Senna, at the Galerie Rene Block, New York. The animal dominates. 'Beuys invites us to see our fellow-men and brothers in the coyote – the residual, accursed part of our nature. It is not only the coyote outside we should get to know, but, with his help, the coyote inside. Such a vision of reanimation, at the term is in casualty, understood in, and extended to, its original meaning of soul (animal is also based on anima),....³²The felt in this work acting as a mediator.

In transforming wool into felt there is a number of interesting stages. You start with something soft and fluffy, it is hair, fur, soft and spongy associated with a living thing. Then as it is wet down and massaged into itself it then takes on a skin like quality. It stretches and forms folds and creases. After much 'working', friction, the fibres knit together, and as they do the felt shrinks and becomes more dense, solid losing any fluffy connotations. The quality of the texture of the resultant felt can be controlled by the extent to which you work it. Less working will result in a more pliable fabric with a 'goose pimply' texture. More working will knit the fibres tighter to a point where the surface is almost smooth and extremely dense giving a stiffer fabric but no texture. The process itself and the resultant material is formless. I was determined to make an

³¹ Alain Borer, *The Essential Joseph Beuys* (MIT Press, 1997).plate 127

³² Ibid.p.25-26

object from a single piece, there was to be no construction, no structural framework. Following are photos demonstrating the change in the material through the process.



Changes in material from raw wool , wet down becomes skin like, and the final product.



Body

"It is evident from Collias' account the abilities of the weaverbird, just like those of the human basketmaker, are developed through an active exploration of the possibilities afforded by the environment, in the choice of materials and structural supports, and of bodily capacities of movement, posture and pretension."³³

I have discovered through my work that craft, or working with the body, is particularly important to me. When I started, I worked in steel with tools. What I liked about this process was the similarity to dress-making, the making of a pattern, and welding/stitching things together. The transformation from two dimensions to three dimensions, similar to architectural processes, and the need to account for the qualities of the material. Finally there is the surface treatment, whether it be left to rust, painted, etched etc...Selecting the surface treatment is fraught, it can detract from the character of the material itself; almost disguising it. When working with paper made from natural fibre it is the individual character of the paper as dictated by the plant of origin that most appeals to me, together with the way in which you can manipulate this. In ceramics the hand can appear through the molding and the potential for adding texture and drawing into the surface.

Weaving and felt in particular, involve the body to a greater extent. With the weaving I was aware of this as I learnt from people who were using their body continuously, not only in the collection and preparation of the material but in shaping as well.



Julieanne Bangalang, (left) cutting root for dye on her foot.

Garnbalabj Nabegeyo (above) making string.



Roslyn Nayilibidj, making a sting bag.

With felt the body is paramount, it is your tool. Especially in the making of large pieces, I found I had to work on the floor, being able to sit on the piece as I laid it out. Then there is rolling, stomping, and bashing, doing whatever you can to compress the fibres, loosening their scales and causing them to knit together. I did make a tool to make the rolling easier finding that to roll

³³ Graves-Brown, Matter, Materiality, and Modern Culture. P .67

a matchstick blind that is over 2m long and heavy with the wool requires more than one person. The tool works like the axle in a car and I had to draw it behind either me or a bicycle, to get the rolling action to work. In the end I was like a horse dragging this thing behind me for hours, ploughing the field. At the end of all this I feel physically exhausted I have used nearly every part of my body in some way, which I find exhilarating and extremely satisfying.



Ploughing the fields to make the felt, 2005.



Stomping in the bath, final stages of felt making, 2005.

Void

"Fermez l'espace! Fermez la poche du Kangourou! Il y fait chaud." Maurice Blanchard³⁴

Having grappled with the controversy of the structure and the relationship between the inside and the outside, in the making of *Keep*. I was less concerned with the outside, I sought to explore internal space. The best way I could see of doing this was to make something that invites you inside through reference to the human body. The form would be dictated by material and the body. I wanted to return and explore the dark, private places of my childhood blanket, cubby houses.

I departed from the rational process of making, there was no image in my head that I was working to. I was no longer constructing a shell but making from within my own body. The body itself was important, not only as a tool but also as the vessel for my emotional self. David Tacey in *The Edge of the Sacred*³⁵ writes about 'The Demonic interior'. In his interpretation of Patrick White's *Voss* (1957) he seems to put *Voss* (the character) forward as an example of the 'Australian' psyche. Where the edge represents the ego, and the centre the unconscious, Tacey goes into a detailed discussion of *Voss*, and its significance to our cultural position today. I see this analogy as potentially providing a framework for the works that I have been making in an attempt to find home, my 'Australian' home.

In light of these 'stories' I wonder whether I have used the outside and the inside as a metaphor for my multiple 'Australianesses'. The difference between living on the edge and living in the centre. The earlier works have a visual connection to the desert. However, they are constructed space, the building of a shell defining an inside and an outside. I read this constructed space as the Australia on the edge; where space is constructed and controlled by people and rationale. The latter, relate, through their material, to a colonial experience, and yet are formed through a sub-conscious experience not through a constructed rationale. It is as though I have used materials and techniques in reverse. A reflection of my own experience of living both on the edge and in the centre of Australia.

³⁴ As quoted in Bachelard, *La Poétique De L'espace*.p.136

³⁵ David J. Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred Transformation in Australia* (Melbourne: HarperCollins Publishers Pty Ltd, 1995).



Dawn Void , 2005. Wool felt. 110dia. X 130cm



Night Void, Wool felt. 100dia. X 500cm.

By placing the two voids together, the vertical versus the horizontal becomes apparent. With the first, *Dawn Void*, I was imaging a kangaroo's pouch, hence the body inside may be curled up but it is hung from another, suspended in air vertically. With the second, *Night Void*, I intended to make a vessel similar in shape to a Greek earthenware pitcher, but that was not how the result. Spending time inside both of these I decided that I liked being horizontal, I felt a stronger connection to the ground not just in a physical sense. Being inside I felt dragged down as if by a magnetic force. Robert Morris experimented with this notion by making cuts in a large piece of felt on the floor, and then hanging this on a wall using gravity to create the form.³⁶

Further interest in the horizontal versus the vertical became apparent when I started to work on drawings to accompany and contextualise the voids. I encountered various levels of contradictions in what I was trying to do. First, I saw the drawings as being on canvas that hung vertically on the wall, scale and proportion referencing doorways. Then it seemed necessary to actually do the drawing on the floor. Once I had started the proportions of the canvas seemed wrong and restrictive, concurrently, I was struggling with drawing on the floor something that would be viewed vertically. I ended up abandoning the drawings altogether and replacing them with what I have called felt sketches. In these the vertical / horizontal is addressed through gravity. I began by making pieces of different shaped felt and then using folding and hanging (gravity), to generate the form.

The drawings presented another contradiction through their materiality. I prepared canvas with rabbit skin glue and gesso made in the traditional manner. I became quite carried away with the process and absorbed in the opportunities this provided for playing with texture. However, once I applied pigment to the textured canvas I realised that it was the texture of the canvas that was making the image. I struggled with this for a while before deciding that what I had done was almost replicate the texture of the felt in the canvas, and that actually what I was after, was something completely different, something soft, and expressive, of or reinforcing, of an internal spatial quality.

Drawing, Canvas, rabbit skin glue, natural pigment. 130 x 240cm. June 2005.



A moment, Wool felt. 27 x 20 x 48cm. June 2005.



³⁶ Rosalind E. Krauss Yve-Alain Bois, *Formless a User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).

The felt sketches took me back to my childhood imagination. This is a theme which was apparent in the earlier works, and then seemed to disappear. Potentially the adult came more into being as I began working extensively with my own body. However, the role of the child's imagination is very important for me. I see it as providing a key to the intangible. I see connection to childhood memories as providing a link to a pureness and vividness of feeling.

Final Presentation

The space in which the work is presented will also play a role in informing the context of the work through its inter-relationship to other objects and the space itself. Initially I had envisaged the works as two separate bodies, those I have identified as early works, and the later works, through the transition making the connection. I had also imagined the space as contained and of an intimate scale, through this arrangement the objects would be in effect tied down. I didn't see this until it became apparent that I would not be able to present them in this spatial configuration. The space I would be using was open, undefined. I realised that this would mean that the individual pieces would also appear to be unattached, floating, lost. It seemed appropriate, they are about being lost, searching for something, somewhere to attach, a place, an idea of place. Feelings combining in a complex matrix that changes continuously creating tensions that keep the cycle going. I hope to be able to use the space to reinforce this feeling.

Performance

I ended up making objects that depend on a body to provide the form. Essentially this means that they need to be occupied. My own experience of spending time in the *VOIDs* and how enjoyable this time was meant that what I actually wanted was for people to be able to gain this experience. The inherent 'don't touch' policy for objects in galleries made this a dilemma, as what I wanted was for people to handle and physically get into the work. I decided to employ two mechanisms. One was to provide a visual key in the form of a 'welcome' door mat at the entrance to the *Void*, and the other was to have people inside initially to in effect lead the way. Overall this approach did seem to work. Once the organised performers exited, the most enthusiastic audience performances came from children, who once they realised they were 'allowed' to go in seemed to thoroughly enjoy themselves and provided much entertainment. The adults who were brave enough to have a go, have reported back that they were surprised at how they felt. The sense of privacy is much greater than you would imagine and the sense that you are in a safe place, a personal space seems to pervade. I hope to take this further and try other ways of enabling this aspect of the work to be experienced.

Conclusion

I have been greatly influenced by the work of many Australian authors and by my own travels and experience of the Australian landscape. I feel that the works I have made during the Masters program are a reflection of my own continuous struggle with who I am in relation to the country where I live which manifests in a search for home. David Tacey's, *The Edge of the Sacred Transformation in Australia*, together with Gaston Bachelard's, *Poetics of Space*, have provided me with a framework in which to explore these ideas. Both authors look at space and place, and the life of these in the subconscious. For me it is the intangible quality of these spaces/places that I have been searching to find a means to express.

I started by finding ways in which to let go of real imagery. I then proceeded to construct shells, spaces representative of the home, relating so I thought, to ways in which we make ourselves feel at home, such as collection and spending time in the place/landscape, drawing in from outside. My mother dying created a turning point in my work. I turned to the body, as site for home. Making voids, containers for my body, things that represented dark interior space, a place that was both warm and comforting, and lonely and unattached. Empty spaces waiting to be filled. A place where the unknown and uncanny dwell.

As a result of this journey I have discovered that time spent in making lets me access 'home'. The making process becomes the making of home. Materials and craft (using the body) have provided mechanisms for this exploration. Making with the body has enabled connection with, and expression of the domestic, while materials enable an embedding in place.

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.³⁷*

³⁷ Kapoor, Lewison, and Tate Gallery, Anish Kapoor : Drawings. P. 1

Addenda

Bridget Nicholson MVA 2003

the proposal aims to explore ideas of 'belonging' and connection to place. Rivers have been chosen for the role they have played historically in the siting of towns and communities and consequently the importance they have to people. Although based initially on functionality this relationship has developed into a deep psychological connection with historical, cultural and individual experiences. Topics for investigation include;

- rivers containers of 'lost' belongings/detritus,
- as books through which history can be read, marking fossils
- rivers as drains removing human debris,
- the river as soul,
- the river as an artery,
- movement, time and change
- nature and power, the desire of man to control and manage.

In its final presentation disparate parts will together to form a body of work, a personal expression of relationship to place gleaned through the process of investigating the above. The work will be presented in the form of an exhibition that incorporates sculptural pieces made from a variety of materials including ceramics, cast objects, and materials collected from field trips. The experience of the space will be further enhanced through 2D visual material either printed or projected and a sound piece.

The aim of the study is to appropriate the natural³⁸ into the domestic, and to study nature from a different perspective potentially that of the 'home maker'.

The proposal relates to my previous work where researching of 'place' formed the basis for design direction and decisions. The motivation and final form of these works were concerned with producing public works that expressed an aspect of the character of a particular place. The intention of the work was to enable people to visualise or utilise a particular place in a manner that would enhance their experience of that place.

methods and materials will be collected and derived from field trips and individual exploration. Materials collected may both be used literally or form the basis for forms, textures, and colour and transposed into other materials where the purpose is to raise questions about materiality.

Specific skills which will be developed are the transformation of organic matter into inorganic material. Initially applying this to ceramics and cast metals. Specific resources will be the technical experience in both clay and metal.

context place belonging cultural identity relationship to land

People who have influenced my thinking and approach are people such as; John Wolseley, David Malouf, Marea Gazzard, Christine O'Loughlin, Hossein Vlamadish, Amish Kapoor, Antony Gormley, Tim Winton, Christo and Jean-Claude

The above have all developed their work to a point where it has a public life and raises the opportunity for public interaction. This is a direction I hope to take with my work.

timeframe to tie in with the course program each semester will have a goal and forms of work to be produced as part of that.

semester one: a sculptural installation that incorporates ceramic pieces. The ceramic pieces will focus on the domestic. Objects such as clothing, bedding, vessels; items that give comfort. Pieces will be made in porcelain to heighten a sense of fragility and add the potential for them to make sound. Textures, patterning and form will be derived from the juxtaposition of these domestic objects with natural matter. Methods will include slip casting and handbuilding. The ceramic pieces will be incorporated into a steel structure, the form of which will be determined to reinforce a sense of fragility but in this case in relation to time and the forces of nature.

Proposal semester 2, 2003

the proposal aims to build on works and ideas developed in semester 1. The river is being used as a means by which to explore ideas pertaining to belonging and home, through the relationship between people and the natural world. To do this I have chosen to create a story of an imaginary person who starts a journey down the river in order to explore this 'place'. The boat made in semester one is the means of travel, and objects created are intended to raise questions about our relationship to nature, plants, animals, forms of landscape, textures and patterns, light and shade which in turn make reference to cultural identity.

The works will be developed in a linear manner, as the journey unfolds, however it is intended that the works themselves may each stand alone and do not need to be viewed solely in this context. Works for this semester will include; further development of the paper quilt or cloak, and ceramic 'midden'. New works will potentially be a shelter structure made from collected organic material and other ideas which will develop from field trips.

The aim of the story is to review the place of nature in our lives and to revisit the appropriation of nature³⁹ into the domestic. Simultaneously drawing on the strength and fragility of both people and nature. In order to do this I also intend to study language used today which effects and potentially colours our understanding or lack there of, in describing these relationships.

methods and materials will be collected and derived from field trips and individual exploration. Materials collected may both be used literally or form the basis for forms, textures, and colour, in this instance primarily in conjunction with ceramics. The manner in which materials are used is particularly important to raising issues outlined above.

Specific skills which will be developed will be the incorporation of organic materials will non-organic materials. The transformation of qualities of organic materials into inorganic materials such as ceramics and cast metals. Specific resources required will be the technical experience in both clay and casting, and in creative writing.

context relationship to land belonging cultural identity strength & fragility

People whose work I will explore include;

Rosalie Gascoingne, Lin Onus, Kim Mahood, Guiseppe Penone, John Nash, Christine O'Loughlin , Eva Hesse, Hossein Vladamish, Peter Read, Tim Lowe, George Seddon, Lucy Lippard

The above are mainly interested in landscape, environment, nature, ecology in some manner. Artists are also included whose approach may be described as domestic or 'craft' like where materiality is important.

field studies as well as participating in the field trips organised by Environment Studio, I am in the process of organising to spend some time in Oenpelli, Arnhem Land, working with the Arts Centre whose artists work predominantly with fibre. My interest in this area is in the collection, preparation and use of organic materials. At this stage the timing for this would be January/February 2004.

timeframe to complete the pieces described above and write the first part of the story to accompany the works. Concepts for further works should be formulated in preparation for semester 3.

Proposal Semester 1, 2004

the proposal is to develop a series of personal/space 'homes', for first semester based on my experience in Gunbalunya. The form of the space is derived from my emotional response to the space that I was living in, the environmental space of the community, and the space that I made for myself by spending time there.

methods and materials I collected materials in Arnhem land that I am using for the personal space pieces. One piece is woven with Pandanus using skills I learnt from the women working at the Arts Centre. The other piece is steel incorporating flattened steel cans and other bits of recycled building type materials.

Context making yourself feel at home is the context for the work. Using natural materials and/or textures is important for me, as is using craft techniques. In my own approach to the work I am trying to achieve a childlike quality where imagery and a sense of story are imbued in the object/space in order to trigger memories and a sense of nostalgia.

References Yvonne Koolmatie, Louise Bourgeois, Hossein Valamanesh

Proposal Semester 1, 2005

the proposal is based on developing a series of personal/space 'homes'. I intend to explore the internal/external relationship in myself as a metaphor for an internal/external relationship with place. The pieces become a reflection on my identity based on the place which colours me.

methods and materials I am going to continue working with wool and using the felting technique as a means of construction. The process may change and I may experiment with sewing pieces together, making as one piece, and incorporating other materials. I also want to develop further the installation aspect of the work for its presentation. Potentially including drawing and/or the making of books/diaries that accompany the work. The intention behind this is to contextualise the work.

Context making yourself feel at home is the context for the work. The process is important to me, again as a means of expressing the domestic and the feminine approach to making home. Therefore I want to persevere with using craft methods. Still taking Gaston Bachelard's, 'Poetics of Space', as a starting point I want to move this into the realm of place, and work with the way in which we embed ourselves subconsciously into the natural world. I am working intuitively and I want to continue to do this avoiding a rational, thought through process, or progression from piece to piece. Recently I have been looking at Ross Mellick's work to which I feel drawn for a number of reasons. The way in which he names his work often by using two

words to give you a glimpse of where he is coming from eg. Egg/Raft but he is not sure, the image is still fluid. Writing about his work others have said, "Mellick's work returns sculpture to the irrational and the subconscious- the symbolic rather than the literal."⁴⁰ His curatorship of the exhibition Spirit + Place 1996 and Tony Bond has said, "Ross Mellick has been interested for some time in the nature of place as an extension of the human psyche".⁴¹ I am interested in how we bond psychologically to place to make ourselves feel safe and secure 'at home'.

References Judith Wright, Martin Boyd, David Tacey, Italo Calvino, David Malouf, V. S. Naipaul, Gaston Bachelard, Lucy Lippard, Stephen Muecke, Ross Mellick, Fiona Folley, Magdalena Abakanowicz, Hossein Valamanesh, Louise Bourgeois, Amish Kapoor, Rachel Whiteread

A lot of these are writers and some in particular fiction. I find they all play into how I feel about who I am and how I am connected to this place.

⁴⁰ Graeme Scurgen, ed., Contemporary Australian Sculpture.

C.V. summary: **Bridget Nicholson**

Academic

- Master of Visual Arts, NITA, ANU Canberra 2003 - 2005
- Diploma of Visual Art - Public Art, RMIT Melbourne 2001
- Bachelor of Fine Arts N.T.U.(incomplete)- printmaking, sculpture, drawing, digital imaging 1998
- Bachelor of Architecture – University of Melbourne 1989- 1990,
- Bachelor of Planning and Design, University of Melbourne 1985 – 1987

Work

- Consultant, ACTPLA for Canberra Central Revitalisation Project, 2005
- Sessional lecturer School of Design & Architecture, University of Canberra, in Materials science., Landscape Design and Urban Design 2003-2005
- Sole practitioner, **Bridget Nicholson Design**, Melbourne 2000-2003
- Landscape Architect, City of Greater Geelong, Geelong Victoria 1999-2000
- Sole Practitioner, **Bridget Nicholson Design**, Alice Springs N.T. 1998-1999
- Senior Landscape Architect, Clouston Pty. Ltd. Darwin N.T. 1998
- Senior Landscape Architect, Taylor Cullity Lethlean, Melbourne Vic. 1995-1998
- Architect, Eggleston MacDonald Architects, Melbourne Vic. 1995
- Landscape Architect, Graeme Bentley Landscape Architects, Melbourne Vic. 1991 1994

Exhibitions/Residencies

- Bundanon Residency December 2004/2005
- Common Ground Two Rivers Festival, Gunnedah 2004
- Injalak Arts & Crafts Centre, Gunbalanya NT, Residency Jan-Feb 2004
- Land\$cape: Gold & Water, Orange Regional Gallery , Sept.- Nov. 2003
- The Lachlan: Blue – Gold, Grenfell ,N.S.W. May 2003
- 2003 Gold Coast Ulrick Schubert Photographic Art Award, Gold Coast Arts Centre, Qld. March 2003
- Yering Station Sculpture Exhibition & Awards, October – December 2002
- '100 Acres' Solo Exhibition, Manningham Gallery, Doncaster Melbourne June 2002

Referees

- John Reid, Environment Studio, Canberra School of Art, Australian National University, Canberra ph: 02 6125 5809, email john.reid@anu.edu.au
- Magdy Youssef, Project Director, Canberra Central Revitalisation, 16 Challis St., Dickson 2601. Ph: 6207 1981, email magdy.youssef@act.gov.au
- Eugenie Keefer-Bell, School of Environment & Design, University of Canberra ph: 6201 5111, email Eugenie.Keefer.Bell@canberra.edu.au

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Installation, Graduate Exhibition, Canberra School of Art, Gallery July 2005.



Installation, Graduate Exhibition, Canberra School of Art Gallery, July 2005.



Night Void (occupied), wool felt, 100diam. X 500cm,
Graduate Exhibition, Canberra School of Art Gallery, July 2005.